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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000688

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [TS](#) [US](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RAISES MIDDLE EAST PEACE WITH THE  
FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: TUNIS 645

Classified By: Ambassador Gordon Gray, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador informed Foreign Minister Abdallah September 17 of a likely telephone call from the Secretary either that day or soon thereafter. The United States is seeking concrete steps from Tunisia in support of reviving the Middle East peace process, including possible re-establishment of an official presence in Israel, support for the Palestinian Authority, and participation in possible future multilateral talks. The Minister expressed doubt that Israel has changed its position on settlements but welcomed a call from the Secretary. The Minister was not as strident in his language about Israel as he had been during the visit by a recent Congressional delegation. Septels (notal) will treat discussions on Iran and Kosovo. End summary

¶2. (C) During his call September 17 to present copies of his credentials, the Ambassador informed Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah that the Secretary wanted to call the Minister to discuss the ongoing travel of Senator Mitchell and the discussions being held with the Israelis and the Palestinians. The Ambassador said that there were indications that there could be forward movement in the coming week. He told Abdallah that the Secretary would likely be seeking Tunisian engagement through concrete measures to help support the restart of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The Ambassador noted that the United States would like Tunisia to consider establishing an official presence in Israel as it had in the second half of the 1990s, find ways to help sustain the Palestinian Authority as Senator Mitchell had requested last spring, and participate in multilateral talks should they be revived. Such steps would be in keeping with Tunisia's moderate approach to Israel over the years and its relations with its own domestic Jewish community. Public steps along the lines suggested would help win over support from within Israel itself.

¶3. (C) The Minister replied that it would be a pleasure to speak with the Secretary. He asked if there were different ideas than those suggested in the letter from President Obama to President Ben Ali. The Ambassador replied that they were in the same vein but that the Secretary would want to pursue them in detail. The prospect of multilateral talks was not yet fixed but could cover a number of possible subjects, such as security, economic cooperation, tourism, or health.

¶4. (C) Abdallah stated that he has not seen a change of attitude by Israel on the issue of settlements. The Ambassador expressed confidence that Senator Mitchell was working to change the situation in keeping with the views President Obama has expressed on several occasions. The United States understands the importance of the settlements issue to all those concerned. The Minister replied that it was of course a very important issue, including to Arab public opinion. If Israel does not change its attitude, things would remain very difficult. He concluded the topic by repeating that he would look forward to a call from the

Secretary with pleasure.

15. (C) Comment: Given that it was the first call by the Ambassador on the Minister, Abdallah was even more calm and pleasant than usual, and very welcoming in his tone. He touched gently on the settlements issue, in contrast with his lengthy comments a few weeks ago during the visit of Codel Meeks (reftel). In that meeting, he clearly stated that Israel must make the first step, and that step should be the cessation of settlement construction. Although he was not detailed in his comments this time, there is no reason to believe that the Tunisian position has changed. End Comment.  
GRAY